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Testimony of Representative Jonathan Steinberg
Environment Committee
February 9, 2011

SB 58: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FEE FOR THE USE OF PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS AT GROCERY AND RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS.

Representative Roy, Senator Meyer and the distinguished members of the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 58: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A FEE FOR THE USE OF PLASTIC AND PAPER BAGS AT GROCERY AND RETAIL ESTABLISHMENTS.

I anticipate that you will hear a number of people testify on this bill today, so I won't belabor the point.

I applaud Senator Meyer's effort to address the plastic bag refuse problem and would typically support any such effort to reduce waste and environmental risk. I'm proud to come from the sole Connecticut community that has taken the bold step to ban retailer plastic bags outright. In fact, as a member of Westport's Representative Town Meeting, I voted for the ban and was an ardent supporter of my colleagues' effort.

Since Westport's ban was passed, we've hoped that other municipalities would follow our example, particularly as time passed and the dire outcomes predicted by some industry advocates didn't occur. In Westport, retailers adjusted and consumers adjusted, albeit with some grumbling. Yes, I forgot to bring my reusable bags into the store often the first couple of months, but now I remember better than 90% of the time. Others should be heartened by this experience yet, to date, we have not seen other municipal bans.

Change usually takes time and relatively little time has passed since Westport's ban was implemented. So, we had remained hopeful – that is until we noted the line in this proposed bill that would forbid other communities from following Westport's lead. I urge the committee not to close the door on plastic bag bans. Whether the Legislature chooses to seek a state-wide bag ban, we should allow municipalities to do so.

When my friends from Westport testify before you, please listen carefully to them, because they can offer you an encouraging perspective on what Connecticut may accomplish, even if one town at a time, on behalf of the environment and sensible conservation.

Thank you.

-- Rep. Jonathan Steinberg, 136th District